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ABSTRACT

Rural school students need ample opportunities to engage in creative writing, particularly the writing of poetry. A student teacher and a cooperating teacher in a rural fifth-grade classroom (with 12 students) guided the students in the writing of limericks by starting out with couplets, then triplets, and then limericks. The teacher had clearly stated objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures. The two students who had trouble hearing rhymes wrote free verse instead. Pupils enjoyed playing with words and noticing patterns in rhyme and spelling. Pupils also volunteered to share their poems with their classmates, and four pupils voluntarily wrote limericks for homework. (RS)

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CREATIVE WRITING IN THE RURAL SCHOOL

ED 390 074

Rural school pupils need ample opportunities to engage in creative writing. Creativity is needed in society to identify and solve relevant problems. Tried and true solutions to problems tend not to work. Thus novelty, uniqueness, and originality are needed in attempts to resolve numerous problematic situations. There are many kinds of creative writing forms that might be emphasized in the rural school language arts curriculum. The balance of this paper will discuss poetry writing as a form of creativity.

Writing Poems

I have supervised student teachers (ST) and cooperating teachers (CT) in the public schools for approximately thirty years. I will describe what both did to guide pupils to do well in creative writing of verse. The station for the student and cooperating teaching experience was a rural school which in September was completely surrounded by growing corn. There were twelve pupils in the fifth grade class. Much personal attention was given to these fifth graders since a ST and a CT taught the twelve pupils.

Previously, pupils had studied and wrote couplets and triplets. The new lesson was to write limericks. The two teachers had clearly stated objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures in their lesson plan. To achieve objectives, the teaching team stressed the first activity which guided pupils to view a set of farm illustrations. These were large enough for all to see and discuss. The first illustration showed a Holstein dairy animal. Pupils were asked to write individually or with a friend a couplet pertaining to the dairy cow. Since review was emphasized here, pupils tended to write and complete the assignment with little lost time. Two writing samples will be given here of what individual pupils wrote.

Holstein Cows

Large animals that give much milk
Each drop feels like soft silk.

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The Dairy

Holstein cows eat much grain and hay
The dairyman works hard to give them this each day.

Pupils volunteered to read their couplets to others in the classroom setting. Each couplet was assessed in terms of expressing novelty of ideas and having two lines with ending words rhyming. Enjoyment of learning was also emphasized in the ongoing activity. Two pupils had problems in writing a couplet. They had difficulties in hearing rhyme. These pupils chose to write unrhymed poems. Although ending words needed to rhyme in the writing of couplets, major stress was placed upon novelty of ideas within the poem. Group praise was provided by the teachers since all pupils who completed their poems had fascinating content in their creative verse. Creativity here came in degrees. Selected individuals revealed much creativity as indicated by the two poems printed above.

In sequence, the ST and CT briefly reviewed with learners the meaning of triplets in terms of writing poetry. They showed a large illustration of weaning pigs in a pen. The contents of this picture were discussed with learners. Next, pupils were encouraged to write a triplet. Pupils were again given flexible time needed to complete a quality triplet. Two good triplets were given to me as the university supervisor. These were the following;

Pigs on a Farm

Young pigs are ready to eat grain
They eat much during the rain
These pigs will be housed in the main.

Pigs and More Pigs

Many pigs are in a batch
They are difficult to match
One looks like he has a patch.

Again the ending words of each poem were evaluated in terms of having these words rhyme. One pupil had the word "watch" rhyming with "catch" and "latch." These words pattern in spelling with the "atch" ending; however, the rhyme pattern is not too consistent yet acceptable in the writing of poetry. Learners were asked to pay attention to ending words rhyming rather than the ending words patterning in spelling. Pupils were asked to think of other words than those used in their poem to also show rhyme in the ending words. Thus in the first listed triplet above which words rhyme with grain, rain, and main and would make creative sense in the poem?

A revised poem resulted such as in the following;

Young pigs are ready to eat in Spain
They eat too much in the water drain
These pigs will be housed in the crane.

Pupils enjoyed playing with words and noticing patterns in rhyme and in spelling. Time was given to all who wished to share their poems orally with other learners. Each pupil volunteered to post his/her poem on the bulletin board. The two pupils who could not hear rhyme well when writing a couplet wrote free verse instead. Thus a pupil wrote the following;

Pigs in a pen
run in circles
eat much
drink water form the waterer
huddle close together.

In sequence, the teaching team read orally three limericks which they had composed personally. These were then neatly printed on the chalkboard. Pupils were asked to describe characteristics of limericks. It did not take long for the class to discover that a limerick has lines one, two, and five rhyme whereas lines three and four rhyme. One learner stated that a limerick is a combination couplet (lines three and four) and a triplet (lines one, two, and five) which rhyme, as well as contain rhythm and meter. They usually start with the words "There once was....."

At this point learners asked if they could write a limerick with a friend. Two desired to write the limerick on an individual basis. Two learners who had difficulty hearing rhyme asked to join peers who were working on their limericks. Each joined a different set of pupils who were highly accepting of others. Excitement was very high in writing and sharing the completed limericks. Pupils selected their own titles in writing their poems. The following poem was chosen by the teaching team to share with myself:

Holidays

There once was a holiday great
Which determined a small boy's fate
He slept and he dined
Until he grew and he shined
Then he won a wonderful gold plate.

Four pupils voluntarily wrote limericks as homework. These were brought to class two days later. The two teachers read each of these limericks to classmates. Enthusiasm is contagious!

In Closing

Rural school pupils should have ample opportunities to engage in creative experiences. Creative thinking is necessary, not only in the language arts curriculum, but also in life's endeavors. New ideas are needed for society to progress and to provide the good things in life for

all persons. Teachers need to stimulate and encourage creative thought by pupils. In oral communications and in written work, creativity as a major goal can become reality.